



#MUSING

Things Dhaka should learn from Chattogram!

As someone who has lived in Dhaka and Chattogram for a more or less equal number of years, I am here to tell you that the port city is much better than the capital. Admit it: Dhaka is overrated. Apologies to my Dhaka folks, but what you call 'jadur shohor' is in fact a boring, ugly, rude, and costly bundle of chaos! Truth hurts, but it's high time for Dhakaites to take some leaves off the Chittagonians' playbook.

A warm, hospitable community

If there is one thing that Dhaka city lacks, it is warmth (and we are of course not talking about the weather).

Have you ever been to a Chittagonian wedding? Or the much-coveted mezban? If you have, there is no argument that Chattogram beats Dhaka when it comes to friendliness and hospitality. While Dhaka people lose hair thinking how to cut the guest list short, Chittagonians invite the entire neighbourhood, at times literally!

Let alone the extended family, I have actually listened to 'miking' announcements where rickshaws roamed through an entire locality inviting everyone to a mezban through pre-recorded messages and loudspeakers.

Weddings too, are an elaborate affair, and a thousand guests are no big deal at all.

In Dhaka, neighbours don't know neighbours. The feeling of a community, albeit some exceptions, is quite non-existent, whereas Chattogram knows how to nurture friendships, not just in terms of ceremonies, but also with its everyday 'bodda culture'.

And 'bodda culture' tops bromance I tell you!

Hanging out does not always have to mean eating out

In Dhaka, recreation and time spent with

friends almost exclusively happen at food places. And as a people, Dhakaites for some strange reason have come to accept it.

Chattogram too has a plethora of amazing places to dine at. Moreover, let's not forget that the city boasts a number of delightful traditional dishes such as kala



bhuna. But what I truly appreciate about my friends in CTG is that their recreation does not always solely centre on food or restaurants.

I have lost count of how many times we went to Patenga Beach in the evenings or how many times we went to Cox's on day trips, and I cherish going to Foy's Lake in minutes or strolling at the War Cemetery,

and I admire casually hiking at Sitakunda or an unplanned weekend getaway to the hill tracts.

Imagine going to Gazipur, Mawa Ghat, or even 100 Feet without much plan! Dhaka's recreational activities are -- for lack of a better word -- rigid.

The art of slowing down

Dhaka people are always in a rush. These busy bees don't know how to relax and wind down. But are Chittagonians any less ambitious or hardworking?

Not at all! Perhaps they understand the value of priorities. I have seen more Dhakaites losing their souls in work or in pursuit of money than I have seen Chittagonians doing the same.

The rat race in Dhaka is unhealthy -- almost toxic -- and arguably that gives the city its cutthroat character. I don't think anybody will differ when I say that Dhaka is predominantly a ruthless and cruel city. Not Chattogram -- where people seem kinder, helpful and laid back.

Of pride and a sense of belonging

Chittagonians have a pride when it comes to their city. In fact, most regions and people outside Dhaka do.

It can be about a national or international personality -- be it in politics, cricket, or other fields -- if the person is from

Chattogram, the people are proud of the matter and love to talk about it.

They also unapologetically love their dialect! For an outsider, Chatgaiyya may just sound loud or even rowdy (as the cliché or stereotype goes), but to a fellow citizen, it is no less than a code -- one involving togetherness and an inexplicable bond.

From food to traditions to dialect, the people of Chattogram know how to own it and carry it with an immense sense of pride!

Compared to that, how many people in Dhaka really think of the city as their own? Some surely do, but many are homesick towards the place they had left, whilst a lot of the citizens do not care much about the city's charm or pulse.

A tale of two cities

So, is Chattogram really better than Dhaka? Being someone whose life can be quite equally divided between the two cities, I am -- well -- divided.

Every time I meet friends from Chattogram, they ask me, "How can you live in this unliveable city of Dhaka?"

I look away and smile. And then I slowly reply, "You won't understand."

But that's a story for another day!

By M H Haider

Photo: Collected